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Obligation, Inc.

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then to MMB

REMINING BUSINESSES, GOVERNMENTS, AND INDIVIDUALS OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO CHILDREN
3100 Lorna Road, Suite 311, Birmingham, AL 35216 (205) 822-0080

July 7, 1996

JUL 11 4 48 PM '96

Mr. Reed Hundt, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554

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DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

Dear Mr. Hundt:

I had the great pleasure of meeting you briefly at the NAB convention. I want to congratulate you on your efforts to make TV stations more responsible to children.

Obligation has two projects that concern television. I think about the projects in terms of the prepositions "to" and "for". First, we have been successful in convincing local Alabama advertisers to move their ads from Trash TV talk shows. These daytime adult-oriented programs are socking it to children, and stations know it. Second, we are bringing to the public's attention the fact that Birmingham TV stations are making a mockery of the CTA's educational and instructional requirements. They are doing very, very little for children.

Birmingham stations list cartoons and teenage sitcoms as programs meeting their requirements. I have seen the programs they put on their quarterly reports. A few rare exceptions have educational or instructional merit.

Please don't allow Saved By The Bell, California Dreams, Bananas In Pajamas, Dumb and Dumber, Free Willy, and America's Funniest Home Videos be considered as educational programming. If they are going to take the FCC seriously about the three hours, then make a joke of the content, then we are no further along then before.

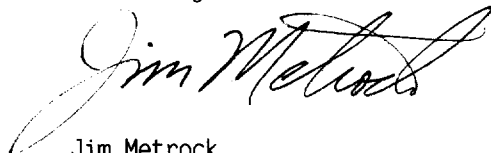
A station in Birmingham has put on In The News for kids at 5:00 AM Saturday mornings. Another puts on Bill Nye at 6:00 AM. They think that is OK by the community and the FCC. Please don't let them treat our children and grandchild that way.

If an adult misspent a trust fund set up for a child, that would be terrible. What TV stations are not doing for children is similar in nature.

I have enclosed a op-ed piece I wrote for the Birmingham News this February. I received nothing but favorably response. Grandparents to teenagers are fed up with what our local stations dump into our homes. They will be equally as outraged when they understand the station's disregard for providing truly educational programming for kids.

A man never stands as tall as when he stoops to help a child. You're standing pretty damn tall. (Excuse the language - too much TV.)

Much Obliged.



Jim Metrock

JTM/bhs

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List A B C D E

Trash television

Talk shows beg the bigger issue: What duty does a local TV station owe to children?

By Jim Metrock

Last summer, I started an effort to convince local advertisers to remove their financial support from sleazy daytime talk shows. This came after it was apparent Birmingham's broadcast stations would not move these programs to late night.

Trash TV talk shows are a programming genre that considers "My son is promiscuous and I'm proud" and "Drag queen makeovers" as worthy topics for our children. If you watch one of these programs, you will be shocked by the local advertisers that financially underwrite this cultural rot.

Talk shows beg a bigger issue: What duty does a local TV station owe to children?

Why does "Family First" Channel 6 put on the family-hostile talk show *Ricki Lake* at 3 to 4 p.m. for kids coming home from school?

And why does WABM air talk shows between 3 to 5 p.m. when the greatest amount of unsupervised children are home in front of the TV?

I was also baffled last fall when Channel 42 distributed flyers heralding their new after-school lineup. It read "Hot! Hot! Hot! The afternoon will sizzle!" Their two new shows were the bathing suit flick, *Baywatch*, and an adult talk show.

Did I miss an entire chapter somewhere? Do our children and grandchildren need more "Hot! Hot! Hot!" or is it exactly the reverse?

But hey, kids, had your fill of human depravity on the graphic talk shows? Switch to NBC 13 for an afternoon of graphic cop reality shows.

Violence is yet another aspect of TV's failure to serve our children.

Yet, the local stations are run by

Jim Metrock is president of Obligation Inc., a Birmingham-based child advocacy organization. He wrote this for The News.

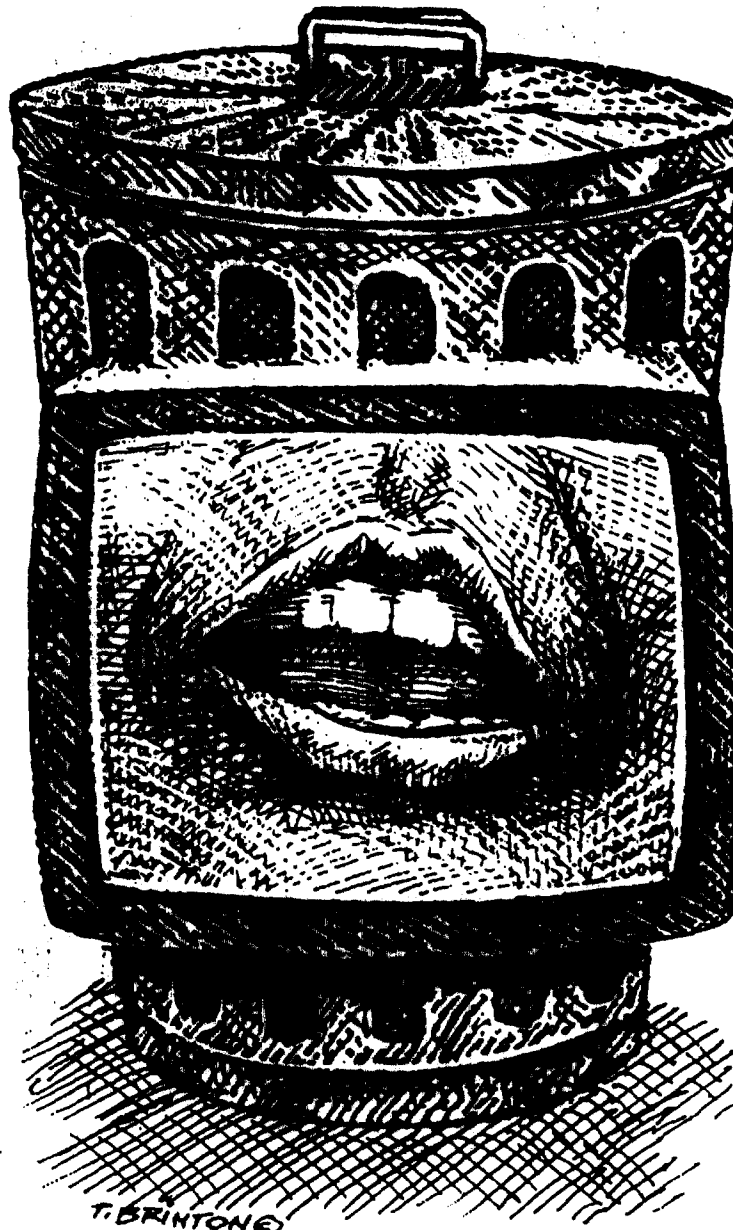


ILLUSTRATION SPECIAL TO THE NEWS/TIM BRINTON

people who care about their community. Their public service is legendary. Then why are these stations doing this to our children?

A partial answer to these questions came for me, three weeks ago, in a darkened ballroom 1,800 miles away.

I was attending the National Association of Television Program Exec-

utives convention in Las Vegas. This is where television programs are bought for the coming year.

It was at a seminar entitled, "Children's Programming — the Quest for Standards" that I began to see how the TV industry viewed children.

A videotaped message from Reed Hundt, Federal Communications Com-

mission chairman, started the meeting. He would like stations to air three hours of children's educational programming a week. He believes broadcast TV stations have not done enough for children. He urged them to use their creativity to help the nation's youth.

That did it.

One of the first panelists to speak was Madelyn Bonnot, an adviser to the Fox Children's Network and a general manager for a New Orleans TV station. She sputtered, "We don't need him (Hundt) telling us what to do." She added, "I don't think my role as a broadcaster is to educate children." She said, "They're getting that damn stuff in school."

Judy Price complained that children's programs are a real drain on her network. Her fatalistic attitude during the discussion was all the more disturbing knowing she was vice president of children's programming at CBS.

Seven TV experts talked for more than an hour. Except for one, this panel talked about how little they could do for children, and still get away with it. (This lack of concern for children was echoed in other panel discussions on TV regulations and the Internet.)

One panelist reminded the audience that in 1990 station licenses were being renewed with just a half hour of educational programming a week. Then later, an entire hour. Now ... three? With a straight face, this man expressed his concern at where this was going to stop. W.C. Fields, with his innate love of children, would have made a good TV executive.

The seminar was a sham. I was astonished and saddened.

There was no "Quest for Standards" in that room. My kids know that quest means to search for something. These people were running away from something. Responsibility.

I had been laboring under a misconception about the TV industry. Now, I know better.

Children are not their public.

Children are their problem.

Trash

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Now, showing trash TV talk shows during daytime and summer vacation almost makes sense.

This year will be an interesting one for broadcast TV in Birmingham. Stations will make major and cosmetic changes. This time next year, TV in Birmingham will be much different. But will it be better?

We cannot leave our local TV stations alone. They will not "get it right" without our help. They need and want public input.

I had the honor of talking to the board of directors of the Alabama Broadcasters Association last week. Yes, they want to maximize profits, but they also listen to the pub-

lic. The problem is we have been silent. The public files of Birmingham stations confirm that. They contain virtually no letters of complaint about programs that offended viewers. Shame on us.

One board member said, "Viewers shouldn't call us, they should write us." He is correct. Letters can be shown to the networks or the distributor of the offensive program. A letter will also go into the station's public file, which the FCC will review at license renewal time.

The FCC has said that starting this year, what a station does for children will be taken into account come license renewal time. Presumably, this review also will cover what

Promoting What Helps Children, Changing What Harms Them

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THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS

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REVIEW & COMMENT

stations do "to" children, as in the case of daytime trash TV talk shows.

I talk to several groups a week. Each is outraged at the apparent indifference of local broadcasters and advertisers to the effect of offensive programs on children. Stations and advertisers will disregard this anger at their own peril.

No less than the editorial board of *Broadcasting and Cable* magazine in its January 29 issue urged the industry to stop resisting "... all those in its audience who feel television is underserving the nation's youth, and thus the nation."

Solutions can begin by raising expectations. Expect local TV stations and advertisers on offensive programs to be responsive to

your letters of complaint. Expect the stations to feature entertaining and educational children's programming instead of trash TV.

Here's one idea: Have a school videotape an hour-long educational program to run from 4 to 5 p.m. (Possible topics: kids doing science experiments, a coach teaching tackling, students teaching Spanish, students conducting a debate, seniors teaching an SAT prep class.)

Kids will be attracted to the grainy, home-made, breezy look of a show like this. Kids will make it entertaining, and it will cost next to nothing. Isn't that better than a talk show filled with foul language and terrible value messages for our youth?

The Hippocratic Oath instructs doctors:

"First, do no harm." First, broadcasters, stop injuring our children. Take trash TV talk shows off daytime TV. That's a start. Stop hiding behind the parental responsibility copout. That issue does not discharge you of your corporate and civic responsibility to air programs that make the community better, not poorer.

Our children and grandchildren do not deserve the filth that oozes from our TVs.

Expect broadcasters and the public to work together to create a local TV climate that will enrich our children, not harm them.

Expect your letters to the general managers, presidents of local advertisers and the FCC to make a difference. You truly can change the face of TV in Birmingham.

Obligation, Inc.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April 30, 1996

BIRMINGHAM, AL - Local TV stations have considered shows like Muppet Babies, The Bugs Bunny and Tweety Bird Show, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, NBA Inside Stuff, the cartoon show Dumb and Dumber, and America's Funniest Home Videos to be examples of programs fulfilling their requirement to meet the "educational and informational" needs of Alabama children.

"This is scandalous," said Jim Metrock, president of Obligation, Inc., a Birmingham-based child advocacy organization. The group recently conducted a review of the Birmingham TV station's public files, dating back to 1990.

The Children's Television Act of 1990 (CTA) established a statutory obligation to serve the educational needs of children. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) is the regulatory body that enforces the CTA and other regulations concerning broadcasters.

Under the terms of the Act, each television broadcast station is required to serve the "educational and informational needs of children" in their overall programming, which is to include "some" programming specifically designed to serve those needs. The FCC is required by the Act to review at renewal time the extent to which television licensees have complied with this programming standard.

The license of all Alabama TV stations come up for renewal April 1997.

Two area of a station's performance will get close FCC scrutiny during license renewal: EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) compliance and CTA requirements.

Metrock said, "We are calling their hand on this charade. Stations should not submit a list of cartoons and teenage sitcoms as evidence of their meeting the children's educational requirements of the CTA."

Other examples of "educational and informational" programs listed by local stations are: the cartoons - Free Willy, Where's Waldo, Blinky Bill, Dennis the Menace, Bobby's World, Bump in the Night, Bananas in Pajamas, and Reboot; and the teenage sitcoms - Hang Time, and California Dreams.

"Local TV stations find themselves in an embarrassing situation. Since they have not been serving the educational needs of our children, they have hardly anything to show the FCC. So they are forced to used tortured logic to make 'educational programs' out of programs that were never meant to be informative."

A word-for-word example from WVTM's public file: An episode of California Dreams called "The Dateless Game" 2/3/96. "Jake participates in a 'dating game' type contest and wins a date with another girl on the same night as his anniversary with Tiffani. With the help of the guys, Jake tries to carry off both dates, but fails. Jake is surprised that Tiffani is not upset about 'the other woman,' but by his dishonesty, and realizes he should have told the truth. [Educational theme: If you are in a relationship, you should have enough confidence in your knowledge of the other person to be forthright and to work out almost any problem that arises.]"

"Every program on TV could be considered educational using this type of crazy thinking. However, the insult to our children is made even worst when you see what they do with some good children's programming. Feed Your Mind is a children's program that has some substance, but it is on at 7:00 AM Sunday morning. That is not 'prime time' for kids."

WABM puts on a truly educational program for kids Bill Nye the Science Guy, but it's on 6:00 AM Saturday mornings. Captain Planet on NBC13 is aired Saturdays at 5:30 AM.

"Think it can't get worst? NBC13 airs News For Kids every Saturday at 5:00AM. Then they want the FCC to give them credit for airing that program for kids. No way," said Metrock.

Obligation found some substantive programs that were aired at decent times such as WBMG's Beakman's World (Saturdays Noon) and WTTQ's Where On Earth is Carmen Sandiego (Saturdays 7:00 AM).

Metrock said the stations will be judged by the FCC on what they have done with children's educational programming for the entire period of their license, not just what they are doing currently. That is why the survey went back several years. "They are coming into license renewal time in pretty lousy shape as far as children's programming goes. They have every reason to be worried."

"The station's need to understand that the Alabama public demands much more from them than the FCC requires of them. We want our stations to be much more responsible to children than they have been in the past."

Metrock said, "General managers of local stations must get their public file in order. They can no longer call programs "educational" that have no educational element. And more importantly, they need to get absolutely serious about serving the needs of Alabama children."

Separately, Obligation has requested all Birmingham TV stations to refrain from broadcasting adult-oriented programming, especially Trash TV talk shows, during their daytime summer schedule.

Obligation is in the ninth month of a campaign to convince local advertisers to not sponsor offensive daytime talk shows. So far 29 local companies have significantly reduced their ads on these programs or have stopped advertising on them.

Metrock said, "If a local company financially underwrites this cultural rot for our children and grandchildren during their summer vacations, they should be prepared to hear from an outraged community."

Obligation urges all news media to inspect the public files of WBRC, WVTM, WTTQ, WBMG, and WABM to verify the information contained in this release.

TRASH TV Talk Shows

Who in Birmingham Would Sponsor This Stuff?

You're Going to Be Surprised.

Teen Who Have Sex for Status

The Ricki Lake Show

The Mark Walberg Show

Transvestites Parading on Air

Teen Criminals and the Parents Who Encourage Them

THE JENNY JONES SHOW

The Gordon Elliott Show

Children That Want to Kill Their Parents

Tempestt

Tuesday, August 15, 1995, Show #: 01: We May Be Identical Twins... But I Hate Your Guts
Teenage Bisexuals

What's it like to be a teenager "coming out"? Today, you'll meet bisexual teenagers who will discuss how their sexual preference has affected their lives and their families. While some teenagers feel bisexuality has become "in vogue" and acceptable today, others have been made to feel like oddities having to overcome anguishing obstacles. Teenage tv has placed on them.

The Maury Povich Show

One-Night Stand Reunions

I'm Proud My 16 Year Old Boy

Has Slept With 200 Girls



Gorden Elliott

The show is a rerun of the 1992 station's...
...and...
...and...
...and...

CARNIE

Teenage Girls Sleeping With Boys of Different Races
Join a Satanic cult in adolescence, fall in love with
ists, marry their cousins, hate their own race, or get
es in midlife,

Baby-sitters Who Kill Kids

DANNY!

MALLARD FILLMORE



Wednesday, August 16, 1995, Show #: 1106-92 RERUN

Statutory Rape What happens when a 19 year old man meets and sleeps with a girl only to find out after being charged with statutory rape, that she is years old? You'll find out today when Melanie and Steven, along with their mothers, meet again for the first time since that fateful night. He says he never told him her age; she claims she did. Hear both sides of this tragic

The Charles Perez Show

THE RICHARD BEY SHOW
Gay Men Kissing on Live TV...



NEWS STAFF PHOTO/PHILIP

Attorney targets TV talk shows' ads

By Greg Garrison
News staff writer

With remote control in hand, attorney Jim Metrock cues the TV in his Hoover office to a seemingly endless highlight film of daytime talk shows Jenny Jones on the subject of one-night stands, Ricki Lake on 13-year-olds who want to get pregnant. Metrock said he didn't realize how bad daytime TV talk shows were until he watched an entire Jenny Jones program. "It was so offensive I realized I had to do something about that," Met-

rock said. He decided to write letters to businesses that sponsor commercials during the programs, asking them to move their commercials to less offensive programming.

"I didn't want to be a media watchdog," Metrock said. "I've seen too many things harmful to kids sponsored by businesses that didn't know what they were doing."

Metrock, who specializes in commercial collections, has applied for non-profit status under the incorporation laws.

See TV, Page 2A

Attorney Jim Metrock has started a personal crusade against advertisers who air commercials on shows hosted by Richard Bey (which airs on WABM-TV), Carnie Wilson (WTTO), Jenny Jones (WBGM), Ricki Lake (WBRC), Danny Bonaduce (WTTO), Gordon Elliott (WBRC), Charles Perez (WABM), Maury Povich (WVTM), Tempestt Bledsoe (WABM), Mark Walberg (WVTM).

TV

From Page 1A

rated name of Obligations, which he runs out of his Lorna Road law office. He started this summer with a letter-writing campaign against Camelot Music, which had CDs with offensive lyrics on headphones in its stores. Camelot responded in July by changing its policy at stores nationwide. Metrock has also lobbied supermarkets to provide checkout aisles without displays of the sometimes steamy tabloid magazines that he feels could warp the perspective of children.

Metrock, a member of Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church, said he doesn't consider himself a religious fanatic. "I'm against censorship," he said.

"We only go after things an agnostic would be offended to have their children watch, not just a religious fundamentalist," he said.

The shows violate common decency so blatantly that there is no need to appeal to religious sentiment, Metrock said. "I don't even have to go to my religious scruples."

Metrock identified 96 Birmingham-area sponsors of daytime talk shows on broadcast TV that he considers offensive. He has sent about 120 letters, primarily to the top 25 or 30 sponsors, asking them to move their advertising to non-offensive programming. Many of the top ad buyers were law firms that specialize in personal injury claims.

Some attorneys were sympathetic to Metrock; others ignored him or sent nasty letters. One lawyer wrote a letter comparing him to Hitler and Stalin.

United Way had public service announcements airing during talk shows, which, even though it was receiving free air time, it requested be moved, Metrock said.

St. Vincent's Hospital also responded favorably, agreeing to move its advertising, he said.

Bill Lang, a spokesman for St. Vincent's Hospital, confirmed that St. Vincent's moved its commercial in response to Metrock's letter.

He said the hospital doesn't do many TV ads but has a "Where miracles happen every day" commercial promoting its maternity services.

"Our agency bought a spot during the Jenny Jones Show. We did make sure that it was pulled," Lang said. "We try to promote family values."

In those and other cases, business executives responded that they did not realize their commercials ran during offensive programming. "They don't know what the content is," Metrock said. "When they buy advertising, they ask what the audience is and how much it costs. I want them to ask what the content is."

Among those not intimidated by Metrock is Rick Cole, owner of Rick Cole's Birmingham Auto and Truck Painting, which has expanded to three locations in six years with growth drawn heavily from advertising.

"We're trying to make a living," Cole said. "We're running ads on the most popular shows on Birmingham

TV"

In his letters to businesses, Metrock notes that he will publicize the names of businesses that refuse to pull ads on what he describes as trash TV.

"That's about as close to threatening people as you can get," Cole said. "When you threaten businesses, some of us are going to say, 'Go to hell.'"

Cole said there will always be advertisers for programming with high ratings, so pressuring advertisers doesn't help children.

"I don't know of anything he's doing to help children," Cole said. "Those shows are not going to be taken off the air. People are watching them."

Cole also disputes that other businesses don't know what shows their commercials are airing with. "When you run a business, you know where you're spending your money, otherwise how do they know their money's being spent wisely?"

Cole said that when he buys a 30-second spot on Jenny Jones for \$85, he sees a direct increase in business that improves his profits.

"I tell them I want on Jenny Jones and Richard Bey — because those are the shows people watch," he said. "I watch them. Sometimes I think they are in very bad taste. They do get a little carried away. They're all trying to get that advertising dollar."

Good businessmen want the most effective advertising for their money, Cole said.

"When we had ads on CBS This Morning, we were lucky if the phones rang," he said. "When we had ads on Montel Williams, the phone rang off the hook. When Jenny Jones comes on, the phone rings off the hook. When Richard Bey comes on, the phones gonna ring off the hook."

But Cole said he doesn't believe children are being hurt by TV talk shows that lean toward the sordid and sensational.

"If I honestly thought we were harming youth, I would not do it," he said.

Metrock said he believes that Birmingham TV stations will eventually take shows off the air if advertisers shy away in spite of ratings.

Legitimizing casual sex, especially among teenagers, seems to be a major message of TV talk shows, he said, and children watch them throughout the summer and on holidays when they're out of school. It's gradually eroding the moral fabric of the nation, he said.

What Metrock does in Birmingham, former Education Secretary William Bennett has been doing on a national level, blasting TV talk shows and mailing letters to their producers and sponsors. Procter & Gamble and Sears have been reducing their advertising on such programs and other advertisers have expressed concern about the preoccupation with deviant sex and violence on the shows.

"If we don't worry about the future, there's going to be a future brought to us — by the producers of Ricki Lake," Metrock said.

The Birmingham News EDITORIALS

Tuesday, November 28, 1995

Rufus N. Rhodes/Publisher 1888-1910
Victor H. Hanson/Publisher 1910-1945

Clarence B. Hanson Jr./Publisher 1945-1983
Victor H. Hanson II/Publisher

James E. Jacobson/Editor
Ronald B. Casey/Editorial Page Editor

Talking trash

TV talk shows are inviting targets for campaign against advertisers

Call him Birmingham's Bill Bennett. Much like the former Bush Cabinet member and author (*The Book of Virtues*) has done nationally, Hoover lawyer Jim Metrock has decided to take on TV's trashy talk shows.

The shows themselves provide him with plenty of ammunition: Jenny Jones on the subject of one-night stands, Ricki Lake on 13-year-olds who want to get pregnant.

Metrock is trying to hit the shows where it hurts — in their wallets. He decided to write letters to businesses that sponsor commercials during the programs, asking that they move commercials to less offensive programming.

He's already had a few successes. United Way and St. Vincent's Hospital agreed to move their spots that aired during talk shows.

Critics may call his efforts threatening, or even censorship, but a more accurate

term would be moral suasion. Metrock is trying to convince advertisers they have a responsibility, indeed a moral obligation, not to advertise on trashy shows.

While some advertisers agree and move their advertising, others complain that the biggest bang they can get for their bucks is during shows like Richard Bey, Montel Williams and Jenny Jones.

That's the easy way out.

The reality is that with parental supervision often missing, children watch these lurid shows after school, during the summer and holidays. Most adults may be sophisticated enough to laugh at the shows' outlandishness. That may not be the case with impressionable children.

Anyone who has spent any amount of time watching daytime talk TV knows Metrock is right when he says, "If we don't worry about the future, there's going to be a future brought to us — by the producers of Ricki Lake."

That's one scary proposition.

Obligation, Inc.

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RECEIVED
JUL 11 1996
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Mr. Reed Hundt, Chairman
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